

Teachers beliefs about citizenship education: Dimensions and differences across teachers and schools

Research Objectives

Over the last three decades, most Western-European societies have become characterized by diverse and transitory migration processes, consisting of migrants frequently moving within the European space, refugees and asylum seekers, migration in the context of family reunification, marriage migration and exchange students and high skilled workers. Traditional processes of acculturation or intergenerational assimilation no longer seem to occur automatically. The recent wave of migration, the so-called European refugee crisis consisting of refugees originating from war zones in the Middle East and Africa, exerts great pressure on Western-European societies when it comes to developing and implementing policies around concepts such as social cohesion, integration, citizenship, identity, and language (Van Avermaet, 2009). Questions about the meaning of national identity, and how to maintain social cohesion and preserve national, cultural and linguistic heritage are of growing concern for policy makers and society as a whole. The national language and knowledge of society are considered essential and definable elements of citizenship and successful processes of integration (Shohamy, 2006).

In Western-Europe, present-day integration policies often make use of the notion ‘active citizenship’, aimed at encouraging migrants to participate socially, politically and economically in the host society. New members of society are not only expected to respect the law, but in addition make an active contribution to civil society initiatives. Hence, expectations are being created – by the government and the wider society – about what it means to be a good citizen and a not so good citizen (Odé & Walraven, 2013; Verhoeven & Ham, 2010).

But not only integration policies are aimed at promoting active citizenship and social cohesion. In many Western societies an explicit role has been assigned to the education system in preparing students for active participation in society in later life. Citizenship education is in fact not a neutral subject, since it is related to the transmission of a set of norms and values considered as shared within a specific society but never completely explicated or clarified. Thus the way citizenship is implemented in direct interaction between teachers and pupils and classroom practices, is to a large extent determined by the beliefs teachers hold on citizenship education and social reality in general. As stated by Zaman (2006): “Little theoretical and conceptual frameworks have examined the direct role of teachers in the schools’ context of influencing the students’ political attitudes and perceptions, and few studies cover building models that illustrate how teachers do influence and change their students in regard to political issues.” Hence, the first objective of this study is to examine the beliefs teachers

hold about citizenship education and to look at the way teachers implement citizenship education in their day to day classroom practices

Secondly, a quantitative (multilevel) approach regarding teachers' beliefs might inform us on how teachers' beliefs are influenced by the characteristics of the school context in which they function the prevalence of various citizenship education beliefs across teachers and schools. Therefore the second objective of this study is to examine the prevalence of various citizenship education beliefs across different teachers and schools.

Another common and paramount characteristic of current integration and education policies in Western Europe is the prevailing monolingual paradigm. Regarding integration and citizenship policies, the monolingual frame of reference views knowledge of the national language as an intrinsic part of the national identity; language is considered an indicator of loyalty, belonging, inclusion, and membership of the (host) society (Shohamy 2006). As to education, this monolingual paradigm implies an almost exclusive focus on proficiency in the national language as the key factor for successful participation in education, the labor market and in the wider society. Educational failure of migrant students, having another home language than the national language, is primarily – and often exclusively – explained by insufficient skills in that national language. In many West European countries, home languages are now explicitly placed outside the curriculum and attributed no value in academic terms. These educational policies, based on monolingual ideologies, are then put into practice by school principals, teachers and school staff through mission statements, curricula and language tests (Shohamy, 2006; Gkaintartzi, Kiliari & Tsokalidou 2015). A previous study, conducted in Flanders, has demonstrated that teachers strongly adhere to monolingual policies, while there are also significant differences across schools related to the ethnic composition of those schools. Furthermore, a stronger adherence to monolingualism was found to trigger teachers to have lower expectations about their students (Pulinx, Van Avermaet & Agirdag, 2016). Although educational policies and citizenship education are both based on a monolingual frame of reference, and language proficiency in the dominant language is considered a key factor for integration and active citizenship, the link between language and citizenship remains – at the most – implicit in school and classroom practices (this is particularly true in the Flemish context, as will be demonstrated below). Language proficiency is considered a condition for integration, and consequently has to be achieved before participation. Language education and citizenship education are considered separate learning objectives, translating into practices such as pull out classes and immersion programs on the one hand and non-linguistic citizenship learning objectives on the other hand. Therefore, the third and main objective of this study is to examine the interaction between teachers' belief about monolingualism in education and their beliefs about citizenship education.

These three research objectives are examined through four research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What aspects of citizenship do teachers find important and can we distinguish different dimensions of citizenship education beliefs among teachers?
- RQ2: Do these dimensions of citizenship education vary across teachers and schools?
- RQ3: Are teacher and/or school characteristics related to the prevalence of different dimensions of citizenship education?
- RQ4: Are different dimensions of citizenship education related to teacher beliefs about monolingualism?

Methods and Data

Population and sample

Data were collected as part of a large-scale, mixed-method and multidisciplinary research project – BET YOU! – on the school careers of pupils with an immigrant background in secondary education (SE) in three cities in Flanders, Belgium (see Pulinx et al., 2016). To obtain a representative sample of schools and teachers in these three cities, all 118 schools which offer general, technical or vocational SE curriculum were invited to participate in the research project. Secondary schools providing special needs programs were not included in the survey. In total, 48 schools or 40.7% of the schools in this population agreed to participate. 775 secondary education teachers across these 48 secondary schools, from first to third grade SE, participated in the survey by filling out an anonymous questionnaire.

Data analysis

The quantitative data consisted of a clustered sample of teachers from within the schools. Because the data are at different levels (individual teacher-level and school-level), multilevel modeling is most appropriate. Missing data were handled with the multiple imputation procedure. With respect to the first research question, we start by exploratory factor analysis (EFA). For the remaining research question, we will conduct a multilevel regression analysis with different dimensions of citizenship beliefs as determinants.

Teacher level variables

Citizenship beliefs. Teachers' beliefs regarding citizenship are measured using fifteen items based on Zaman (2006).

Monolingualism. Teachers' beliefs in favor of monolingual ideology in education are measured using eight items. Similar items had already been used in a previous research conducted in Flanders (see Pulinx et al., 2016).

Track. We distinguish between four types of teachers according to the educational tracks in which they function. In Flanders we distinguish mainly three tracks: general, technical and professional track.

We also control for *teacher gender* and *teacher experience*.

School-level variables

Ethnic minority composition. School ethnic minority composition is measured by the percentage of ethnic minority students in school, as estimated by the teachers.

School sector. The school sector variable was split between 24 publicly run schools and 24 privately run schools. This reflects the educational situation in Flanders where around half of the schools are Catholic schools.

Results

Research question 1

The EFA shows that we can distinguish three dimensions of citizenship, as offered to students at school: 1) dimension of social engagement (e.g. to understand people with different opinions and belief; to know what to do to protect the environment); 2) dimension of authoritative citizenship (e.g. to obey the law; to work hard); and 3) participative citizenship (e.g. becoming a member of a political party; to participate in political discussions and debates).

Research question 2

All three dimensions vary significantly at school and teacher-level. Hence, this supports our suggestion that what teachers understand about citizenship education is dependent on the school-context and also related to personal characteristics. However, it should be noted that the variation across schools is much smaller than the variation across teachers.

Research question 3

Some teacher characteristics and school characteristics were significantly related to teachers' beliefs about citizenship education. However, the size and the direction of the effects was different across the dimensions. For instance, female teachers put more stress on the social engagement and authoritative dimension of citizenship than their male colleagues, while no gender differences were found w the participative dimension. Teacher experience was statically related to the social engagement participation dimension with more experienced teachers putting more stress on these dimension. Most importantly, teacher working in school with more ethnic minority pupils found the social engagement dimension less important than teachers working in school with a lower share of ethnic minority pupils. The reverse is true for the authoritative dimension: teachers working in school with more ethnic minority pupils focused more on this dimension than teachers working in schools with less ethnic minority pupils.

Research question 4

Finally, we found that teachers who adhere more strongly to monolingualism in education gave more attention to the authoritative dimension of citizenship education and less attention to participatory dimension.

Significance of the study or work

Civic or citizenship education has become increasingly important. However, very little is known about the way citizenship education is implemented; the effects on pupils and the beliefs teachers hold about citizenship education. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), conducted by the International Association of Educational Achievement (IEA) is the largest recurring, international study conducted on civic and citizenship education. Although teachers are included in this study, the main focus is put on measuring the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of students regarding citizenship. So far, little is known about teachers' beliefs regarding citizenship education. Hence, this study has the potential to contribute greatly to our scholarly knowledge about the topic that clearly has an important societal significance as well.

References

- Gkaintartzi, A., Kiliari, A., & Tsokalidou, R. (2015). 'Invisible' bilingualism—'invisible' language ideologies: Greek teachers' attitudes towards immigrant pupils' heritage languages. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 18(1), 60-72. `
- Odé, A. & Walraven, G. (2013). *Binding en Burgerschap. Buurtbetrokkenheid in Rotterdam en Den Haag*. Garant.
- Pulinx R., Van Avermaet P. & Agirdag O. (2016) Silencing linguistic diversity: The extent, the determinants and consequences of the monolingual beliefs of Flemish teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, DOI:10.1080/13670050.2015.1102860.
- Shohamy, E. (2006). *Language Policy. Hidden agendas and new approaches*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Avermaet, P. (2009). Fortress Europe? Language policy regimes for immigration and citizenship. In Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero and Stevenson (eds): *Discourses on Language and Integration. Critical perspectives on language testing regimes in Europe*. 15-44. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Verhoeven, I. & Ham, M. (2010). De overheid op zoek naar brave burgers. In Verhoeven, I. & Ham, M. (red.), *Brave burgers gezocht. De grenzen van de activerende welvaarstaat*. Amsterdam: Van Genneep.
- Zaman, H. (2006) *Teachers' perceptions of citizenship and citizenship education: A comparative study*. Doctoral dissertation, university of pittsburgh.